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Even the Rain: A Confluence of Cinematic and Historical Temporalities

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E*ven the Rain* (Icár Bollaín, 2010) takes a metacinematic approach to the story of a Mexican film crew in Bolivia shooting an historic drama on Christopher Columbus's conquest. With the water rights riots in Bolivia as a background, Bollaín uses different cinematic styles to establish disturbing parallels between old European imperialism, the recent waves of corporate exploitation, and on the individual scale, the exploitation of Bolivian actors for the benefit of the global film industry. The film within a film device furnishes some insights on the dynamics and pressures that crews face when developing a socially engaged film. Bollaín warns that these productions can fall into a colonialist dynamic by reproducing the imbalances between the 'visible' countries in the global film market, and 'invisible' countries whose native actors and visually appealing locations are exploited. *Even the Rain* blends several cinematic tendencies, which at times clash to create a temporal short circuit. One is the visually stunning historic drama reminiscent of Hollywood epics. Another is the documentary-style shooting of Cochabamba's urban guerrilla crisis, in which the heritage of the 1960s new waves of Latin American cinema clearly emerges. The sequences showing the film crew shooting the historic drama on Columbus at times clash with the other temporalities, and these moments are effective in reinforcing the claim that cinema should maintain a dual role of witness

on contemporary abuses and preservation of memory.

The main characters of *Even the Rain*, director Sebastián and executive producer Costa, find the production of their film put into question with the abrupt intrusion of anti-government protests in Cochabamba in 2000 following the sale of Bolivia's water rights to a private multinational consortium. As Sebastián and Costa work at re-enacting the Spanish imperialistic ideals of Columbus's age, they are challenged by the native actor-activist Daniel (Juan Carlos Aduviri) to wrestle with the parallels between their film and the current water issues faced by the Bolivian people. While Sebastián refuses to take action, Costa will overcome his initial cynicism and understand that in the new millennium, water is the new gold. Differently from the documentaries *Blue Gold: World Water Wars* (Sam Bozzo, 2008), *The Corporation* (Jennifer Abbott and Mark Achbar, 2003), and even the animation *Abuela Grillo* (Denis Chapon, 2009), Bollaín's approach to the subject of water rights refrains from pedagogic approaches in favor of a more poetic and evocative narrative. *Even the Rain* does put in evidence that in order for water to remain a public trust, an active local government will have to collaborate with local citizens. However, this is suggested via an imaginative rather than a prescriptive attitude, using powerful storytelling and the application of conceptual histories and temporalities.

Bollaín's film emphasizes the continuity of colonialism in its different forms throughout the centuries. She does this while engaging with the changing styles of regional Latin American cinema over different periods. In other words, the history of colonialism and the history of Latin American cinema are not separate histories,

but together form an articulated critique of colonialism, made possible thanks to the application of different stylistic approaches to the cinematic medium. The metacinematic narrative and the Cochabamba riot sequences evoke the season of sociopolitical documentaries of the 1960s and 1970s, characterized by the use of location shootings, a mix of professional and non-professional actors, natural lighting, hand held cameras, and a degree of improvisation in the dialogues. The intimate quality of some sequences in *Even the Rain*, the presence of actor Gael García Bernal, the psychological development, and the character-driven plot suggest a link to the New Waves of Latin American Cinema of the 1990s, which typically offer emotionally charged narratives in realistic settings (Schroeder Rodríguez 33).

The multi-layered hybrid style of *Even the Rain* brings Latin American Cinema into the new millennium, thanks to its extreme self-reflexivity. I explore how such self-awareness is functional for *Even the Rain* to locate itself ideologically in antithesis to the frozen nostalgia of Hollywood films depicting the conquest of the Americas, particularly those made for the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival. Instead, Bollaín's rich and textured aesthetic style reflects her unique perspective as a Spanish director working on an international co-production in Bolivia. While the film addresses the contemporary issues of the role of the local government in the Bolivian crisis, issues of infrastructure, and current assumptions about what is ethical regarding access to water, the innovative aspect of the film is in Bollaín's vision of Latin American histories (the late 15th and early 16th century as well as the recent *guerra del agua*) in its evocation of Friedrich Nietzsche's "eternal return" and the anguishing scenario a demon presents to humanity:

This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain, every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you.... The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust! (273-74).

Nietzsche's notion of history assumes considerable importance in Bollaín's film. *Even the Rain* considers the cyclical recurrence of exploitation in the poorest Latin American nations, from colonialism to the more sophisticated neocolonialism of late capitalism; represented not only by multinational corporations but also in international film productions. The film's characters are entrapped in a Nietzschean dimension for most of the film, doomed to the eternal failure of something that will always remain the same and will never change. However, if the film faces absolute nihilism, it ultimately does not fall into it. As mentioned above, Costa does not stoically accept yet another cycle of colonial invasion but begins to comprehend the native's point of view.

Even the Rain includes some visual samplings of a recent historical event, the Cochabamba riots, that needs to be repeated, retold, and reframed in an endless hermeneutic process over a decade later, and that in turn evokes the specter of Columbus in an endless game of mirrors. When colonialism is replayed via the Cochabamba affair, this implies a perspective from which historical events appear without the mitigating circumstances of their transitory nature. If the classic cinematic time of a historic drama can be geometrically imagined as a straight line composed of scenes chrono-

logically progressing toward a climax, the narrative time of *Even the Rain* is circular—the story of colonialism loops like a snake devouring its own tail/tale. *Even the Rain*'s addictive promise is that it may reveal the motivations and the causes of colonialism, which generates the desire to re-watch and analyze the film, although the answer will always remain beyond it.

Even the Rain's complex narrative structure is based on several different layers that relay the main events of the film (Santaolalla 215). Here, I construct upon those layers, moving from those that are closer to the actual Cochabamba events that form the film's true historical background, to the fictional ones. Bollaín distinguishes between what events count as historical and truthful, and which are imaginary and mythical, or just erroneous accounts. However, is important to keep in mind that each category is not to be considered a separate box. Rather, "history is an open ended process rather than a closed science and a fatality" (White xiii). In *Even the Rain*, the temporalities are deeply porous. I pay particular attention to the confluence of temporalities; those moments in which they overlap, creating short circuits through which the film most effectively faces the questions related to colonialism (what went wrong) and neocolonialism (what is wrong).

The Use of TV and Radio Newsreel

Even the Rain incorporates actual television footage and radio newsreel of the Cochabamba riots in several scenes where the director and producer watch and comment on the news. These raw documents establish the simultaneity between the narrative of the crew shooting the Columbus film and the

Cochabamba riots, setting the present tense of *Even the Rain* around the year 2000. As the film's characters learn about the events taking place through the actual footage, the film's international audiences may also learn about the Bolivian water crisis at the turn of the millennium.

Several years ago Bolivia sold its water system and rights to Bechtel's subsidy *Aguas de Tunari*, a consortium of corporations led by International Water Limited, which resulted in a 300% rise in consumer charges. The tariffs were devastating to the people of Cochabamba, where the minimum wage was less than US \$100 per month. Many people found themselves spending one-third of their income on water. Popular resistance was harsh in Cochabamba, and the *guerra del agua* broke out in one of the country's largest cities, lasting for several months.¹ Bolivia faced the paradox of having its people prohibited from collecting their own water (inspiration for the title of Bollaín's film), while its politicians used the military and police forces to protect the interests of foreign investors.

Water privatization came to Bolivia as a theory, on the wings of foreign coercion. The World Bank officials who pushed the plan to bring in multinational corporations proclaim that it would deliver three things that impoverished countries desperately needed—strong managers, skilled technical experts, and investment in expansion service...In Cochabamba, however, the theory didn't work out quite the way its proponents said it would. (Shultz and Draper 39-40)

During the riots, more than a hundred people were injured, many were detained, and a teenager died after being shot by the Army.² In the end, the government reversed

the privatization process and forced Bechtel out of the country.

It is significant that Sebastián and Costa learn about these dramatic events via the media rather than through the locals with whom they are working. In effect, the television and radio sequences establish Sebastián and Costa as outside observers of the crisis. Their immediate concern is solely about their ability to continue shooting the film. Their lead actor, Daniel, is actively involved in the riots, and they worry about the possibility of his being arrested or injured by the police, as it would cause delays in their production timeline.

Behind the Scenes of the Historic Columbus Drama

This subplot focuses on the apparently minor character of María (Cassandra Ciangherotti), a filmmaker whose task is to shoot a "making of" documentary about the historic Columbus drama. However, María soon reveals herself to be more perceptive than Sebastián and Costa, feeling an instinctive empathy toward the exploited Bolivians. Her character problematizes the issue of *where* to look. Should she focus on the film's representation of the colonialist past and furnish insights about the upcoming cinematic work whose goal is to expose the brutality of the conquest of the Americas, which involved the massacre of Native Americans in the search for gold and other natural resources? Or rather, should she turn her lightweight digital camera toward the popular rebellion against the privatization of water in Cochabamba, displaying her engagement in the fashion of Latin American documentaries such as *Battle of Chile* (Patricio Guzmán, 1975-1979), and

in doing so create an “alliance between cultural politics and social history” (Pick 4)?³ María’s sequences are easy to distinguish from the rest of *Even the Rain*, since images produced by her digital camera are grainy, occasionally appearing in black and white. This seems to suggest that the lightweight, economical digital technology may revitalize the 1960s and 1970s idea of cinema as an instrument of critical and ideological awareness. Again, her impulse to shoot footage of the guerra del agua makes the point that it is not enough to make a film denouncing the effects of colonialism in the distant past, but to also recognize that the Cochabamba riots are a repetition of that very history that has been continuing for centuries.

The behind-the-scene sections of *Even the Rain* reveal Bollaín’s familiarity with Latin American cinematic histories. In the 1960s and 1970s Latin American directors expressed the need for a cultural decolonization both from Hollywood imperialism (First Cinema) and European auteurist cinema (Second Cinema). In order to understand how *Even the Rain* deals with this heritage, it is worth mentioning two important manifestos. In “Towards a Third Cinema” (1971) directors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino stress the need for cinema to “examine *the causes*, to investigate the ways of organizing and arming for the change,” also recognizing that “our time is one of hypothesis rather than of thesis” (56-57). This statement applies to Bollaín’s approach to issues of gold, water, and underdevelopment. There is no doubt that *Even the Rain* is against colonialism and neo-colonialism, thus in general agreement with these manifestos. However, the film also intends to generate self-awareness on how these histories have been mediated rather than to impose a political thesis or solution. Bollaín is concerned with trying to

find a cinematic rhetoric capable of representing different and even opposing political contexts, not as a priori principles but as a dialogical exchange. In doing so, through the use of non-chronological and elliptical temporalities, she pragmatically combines militant documentary footage with global images of television in order to deliver her anti-colonialist argument through an innovative aesthetic.

In “For an Imperfect Cinema” (1969) Cuban director Julio García Espinosa declares that ideas of quality have been contaminated by Europeanized values and that questions of taste need to be reexamined: “The only thing Imperfect Cinema is interested in is how an artist responds to the following question: what are you doing in order to overcome the barrier of the ‘cultured’ elite audience which up to now has conditioned the form of your work?” (82). *Even the Rain* is a moral tale about the divisions within the region and between Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula, and how to possibly overcome them. When it comes to the divisions within the region, it is worth remembering that the film opens with an endless line of Bolivian actors and technicians willing to wait for hours in order to audition for a Mexican director. In recent years Mexico has established itself as a source of contemporary art films and as a major market for distributors. In contrast, Bolivia never had a film industry and only produces a few sporadic films every year, most of them shot with low budgets. Only in the last two decades has there been a modest but significant professionalization of the industry, possible thanks to the declining costs of digital technology (Crespo).⁴ Thus, from a Bolivian point of view, the flourishing Mexican film industry, together with that of Argentina and Brazil, comprises

a new sort of elite. The Bolivian actors waiting for a Mexican director is a reference to the fact that some Bolivian movies, especially Juan Carlos Valdivia's films, have relied heavily on Mexican funding and they typically have Mexican actors as part of the conditions for funding. Bollaín illuminates the gap in understanding on the part of the Spanish and Mexicans regarding other Latin American cultures. For example, when Costa and Sebastián arrive in Cochabamba, María interviews them and a revealing dialogue takes place about the film's historical accuracy, and its relative insignificance to the producer when it comes to the use of indigenous people in the film.

- M: We're in Bolivia, it doesn't make much sense. 7,500 feet above sea level, surrounded by mountains, and thousands of miles from the Caribbean.
- S: Well, Costa thinks Columbus landed by parachute.
- C: Costa knows this place is full of starving Indians, and this means thousands of extras. None of that digital shit. I want scale, all the money up on the screen.
- S: So sloppy! Have you seen their faces? They're Quechua.
- C: So?
- S: They're from the Andes! What's Columbus doing with Indians from the Andes?
- C: Look, they're Indians. That's what you wanted?
- S: No, no...
- C: Give me a fucking break, they're all the same.
- S: [Gesture for María to stop her filming]
- C: You can negotiate things here. Hotels, transport, catering... whatever.
- M: So, it's about money.

- S: Yes, it's always money, always. In this case very little money, right? Right, you miserable cheapskate?
- C: If we'd filmed in English, we'd have double the money, and double the audience. Almost had the deal done till you fucked it up.
- S: Because Spaniards speak Spanish. What if we'd done it in English?
- C: We'd been fucking smart.
- M: So, the Spaniards speak Spanish, and the Tainos that Columbus found speak Quechua?

María's task in creating the behind the scenes documentary is to implicitly request that subjects break from self-consciousness when the digital camera is pointed at them, not worrying about how they come across. Instead, both Costa and Sebastián are uneasy when challenged by her questions. Although they are professionals in the visual culture realm, in terms of appearing on camera they are rank amateurs. In this and other sequences there is an evident lack of complicity with María, and throughout *Even the Rain* she is often censored and interrupted by her colleagues. When María points out how Sebastián is imposing an artificially constructed identity on the Indians, while maintaining cultural identity by shooting the film in Spanish, she implicates him of imposing a white view of Latin America on the film. Furthermore, Costa's views were completely removed from a cultural sensibility, as he wanted to shoot the film in English, since his interests lie solely on the financial prospects of the film.

These dynamics are not unusual, and after Espinosa's essay, when an *auteur* such as Bollaín traverses the familiar territory of colonialism, one may question why Europeans, rather than Latin Americans, should make yet another film on colonialism.

There is no doubt that co-productions can easily become sites of cultural misunderstandings and generalizations rather than ethnographic expeditions of discovery. Cinematographies from different continents have at times successfully appropriated each other's languages for their own political and economic purposes. As Mike Wayne remarks in *Political Film*: "We can have First and Second Cinema in the Third World and Third Cinema in the First World" (6).⁵ Although production practices and textual strategies vary, the divisions within the three cinemas have historically been porous, and this process of hybridization accelerated after 1989. Due to the effects of a globalized economy, the transnationalization of culture, and political exchanges, Spanish and Portuguese producers and filmmakers often cross the Atlantic, at times recasting the tradition of Third Cinema. *Even the Rain* itself is a co-production of Spain, France and Mexico that establishes both a new cultural awareness and artistic standards. Its strength is in constantly interrogating how the global-local relationship is conditioning the outcome and the flow of ideas and how are the new modes of production are transforming national and regional subjectivities (Alvaray 55-56).⁶ Bollaín seems convinced that it is not necessary that only a person who belongs to a specific ethnic group can deliver a statement about that group's history and struggle. A movie is not solely an expression of the director, but inevitably involves the contribution of multiple figures. In this sense, María is a key figure because she constantly interrupts our identification process and, more importantly, begins to locate her gaze on the local Bolivians.

Having said this, it is easier to understand the quasi-obsessive self-reflexivity that characterizes *Even the Rain*, a prismatic aesthetic in which the point of view

and the values of Sebastián and Costa are questioned by and coexist with that of a fledgling digital documentarian. Bollaín's work is not a straightforward defense of indigenous cultures, but a film about how arduous is to articulate such a defense. Her first demand is that *Even the Rain* simultaneously keeps track of the local and global contexts, of the underground relationships that connect the different and multiply implicated geographical cultures. The result of this imaginary project is the rupture of the stark divisions between the three cinemas, toward a hybridized and nomadic aesthetic that may better fit both the intellectual and practical needs of the post-globalization era.

The Film Crew Shooting the Historic Drama on Columbus

The casting of Bernal in the role of Sebastián problematizes his stardom in the film as an ambitious director so absorbed by his cinematic masterpiece that he becomes blind to the second invasion of globalization that is happening in front of his eyes. Since the early 2000s Bernal has become the face of the so-called New Latin American Cinema thanks to works such as *Y tu mamá también* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001), *Amores Perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2001) and *The Crime of Father Amaro* (Carlos Carrera, 2002). He also famously played a young Ernesto Che Guevara in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004). At the same time, he appeared in *Nike Football: Write the Future* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2010) and the Levi's commercial *French Dictionary* (Ivan Zacharias, 2003). While in his youth he often criticized the US film industry for stereotyping Latin American characters, he

has recently appeared in Hollywood romantic comedies such as *Letters to Juliet* (Gary Winick, 2010) and *A Little Bit of Heaven* (Nicole Kassell, 2011),

The cultural politics of Bernal's stardom, in which idealism, rebellion and commerce coexist, brings to mind Jean-Luc Godard's formula "children of Marx and Coca Cola" (*Masculin, féminin*, 1966). This contradiction emerges in the film with an exchange Sebastián has with the prefect of Cochambaba, who has deals in place with the multinational capital:

P: In this globalized world the Indians burn water bills and hurl rocks at the police. It's the cult of victim versus modernity.

S: I don't want to be rude but if some one earns two dollars a day, he can't pay a 300% increase in the price of water. At least that's what I am told.

P: How curious... that's what I'm told you pay the extras.

S: Yes, but we are on a very tight budget.

P: Aren't we all?

The socially engaged Sebastián is entangled at the moment in which he agrees to work for the global industry. He is being pressured by his producers to adhere to the budget, requiring him to justify his exploitation of the local actors by rationalizing that it is for a noble cause, that is, to denounce old colonialism.

Some critics such as Stephen Holden and Roger Ebert have insinuated that Bollaín herself may have underpaid her own extras. "The movie is brave to raise the questions it does, although at the end I looked in vain for a credit saying, 'No extras were underpaid in the making of this film'" (Ebert). "Consciously or not, *Even*

the Rain risks subverting its own good will. You can't help but wonder to what degree its makers exploited the extras recruited to play 16th-century Indians. Inevitably *Even the Rain* is trapped inside its own hall of mirrors" (Holden). Such remarks beg the question of whether the metacinematic strategy of showing a crew shooting a film on Columbus, which brings within itself a high degree of self-reflexivity, may be sufficient to justify the ethics of the project. Or is *Even the Rain* entangled in the spiral of exploitation that it describes, as Ebert and Holden suggest? It would be unfair not to recognize that Bollaín is one of the few directors to drop the guise of innocence and to confront us with the issue of the cinematic exploitation of regional and international production in Latin American countries. These are too often overlooked in the name of the contents movies intend to deliver. The debate reminds me of the remarks Jean Baudrillard made in *Simulacra and Simulations* regarding Francis Ford Coppola's anti-war colossal *Apocalypse Now* (1979), shot in the Philippines for its access to military equipment and cheap labor:

Coppola does nothing but that: test cinema's power of intervention, test the impact of a cinema that has become an immensurable machinery of special effects. In this sense, his film is really the extension of war through other means, the pinnacle of this failed war, and its apotheosis. The war became the film, the film becomes the war, and the two are jointed into their common hemorrhage into technology (59).

Paraphrasing Baudrillard, a pessimist may say that Bollaín points out that colonialism and neocolonialism became the object of numerous Latin American films, and that

in turn Latin American films contribute to neocolonial exploitation. However, to have effectively emphasized this dynamic is not a small achievement, especially because in doing so, Bollaín problematizes the triumphalist pan-Latin American rhetoric, whose climax, cinematically speaking, was the famous farewell monologue to Peru delivered by Bernal as Che Guevara in *Motorcycle Diaries*:

We believe that...the division of America into unstable and illusory nations is a complete fiction. We are one single mestizo race from Mexico to the Magellan Straits. And so, in an attempt to free ourselves from narrow-minded provincialism, I propose a toast to Peru and to a United America.

At the end of *Even the Rain* this idea is not denied, but reaffirmed. However, while the Mexican Sebastián remains self-absorbed, the Spanish producer Costa has a crisis of conscience and risks his own life in order to save the young daughter of the native actor Daniel. In order to express his gratitude, Daniel gives him a present, and in the final moment of the film we find out that it was a little ampulla of water, the most precious thing in Bolivia. So, the brotherhood and mutual understanding evoked by Guevara and the spirit of the speech quoted above is ultimately reinforced in this episode of transcontinental understanding. Bollaín suggests that without self-consciousness no ethical affirmation is possible.⁷ However, this understanding as presented in the film may be too simplistic. Costa's change of heart happens abruptly and unexpectedly at the end of the film, and we now have a narrative of the natives reliant upon a European savior's intervention to save them.

Until his change of heart, Costa is the most unforgiving and exploitative character, and one would expect another, more sympathetic member of the crew such as María or Sebastián to be the one to step in and help. This apparently happy ending may be another choice that Bollaín made to imply the continuity of colonialism through Costa.

Scenes from the Historic Drama on Columbus

The most visually appealing parts of the film portray the beautiful Bolivian landscapes as the setting for the first encounter between Columbus and the Native Americans. The Columbus film in *Even the Rain* is a soaring epic period film that visually resembles a Hollywood style production, while its contents are deeply anti-colonialist. Around the time of the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival, Hollywood directors revisited episodes of the colonialist history, exploring the first wave of globalization depicting the exploitation of American soil and the massacre of its natives (Haddu, 157). These works were typically characterized by huge sets, casts of thousands and spectacular battle scenes, such as in Ridley Scott's *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992), *Christopher Columbus: The Discovery* (John Glen, 1992), and Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), followed by the more recent and visionary work of Terrence Malick in *The New World* (2005). In these works, it is implied that directors are dealing with an event from the distant past that is completely removed from the contemporary socio-political situation. In this sense, despite the alleged realism, even the most brutal sequences of torture, rape and mass murders are just a sad spectacle, and figures such as Columbus become an

animation coming from the pages of a dusty history book, and thus dead in advance.⁸ In the polished images of Hollywood films, dramatic episodes of European colonialism assume an aura of nostalgia.

This nostalgic feeling goes along with Malick's lament for the loss of the noble savage in *The New World*, in which America's colonial history frames the Pocahontas-John Smith story. Interior monologues and an emphasis on animals and nature support the belief in a golden age in which natives were living according to benign values.⁹ The film poses questions such as: why are we born into the world and part of the world, while at the same time feeling that we have been exiled from it? Why doesn't the world's beauty prevent us from suffering?

The first to idealize the simple life of the indigenous Americans is the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas in his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552), in which he praises their simple manners and inability to tell a lie. In *Even the Rain*, Bollaín creates a distancing effect when she includes the Dominican friar's character in the Columbus film, reciting his lines at a dinner for the crew in which everyone is drunk. These lines denouncing the suffering of the indigenous people are recited mechanically, and emptied of their original meaning. In effect, the crew cannot see the continuity of colonialism, and the injustices they depict in their own movie are still occurring in different forms even as they enjoy their dinner. This sequence is an example of how Bollaín creates a clash between the two main temporalities of the film, distant past and present, in order to construct the argument that it is not enough to film Columbus in a negative light in antithesis to Hollywood, but it is important to make the connection that the history of colonialism continues today. Sebastián, while fully committed to showing the devastating effects of

colonialism as past history, closes his eye to its manifestation in the present, as toward the end of the film he pleads with Costa to move the production to a safer location away from the riots: "This confrontation will end and it will be forgotten. But our film is going to last forever." *Even the Rain* does not juxtapose good and evil in a Manichean way, rather it blends and confuses them, requiring an active spectatorship that asks audiences to arrive at their own position on the morality of the crew.

The historic drama sequences of *Even the Rain* are indebted, visually speaking, not only to the Hollywood films on colonialism mentioned above, but also to the groundbreaking *The Mission* (Roland Joffé, 1986) and *El Dorado* (Carlos Saura, 1988) and *La otra conquista* (Salvador Carrasco, 1998). The postcolonial position of the latter films is closer to that of Bollaín, since they engage with critique of dominant historical representation and reestablish a sense of Latin American identity on screen. In addition, in several sequences they portray the ways European conquerors misbehaved. However, the film within the film expedient allows Bollaín to unapologetically display the horrors of colonialism with an extreme self-awareness, giving her film the additional value of linking old colonialism to the present.

The ethical tension of *Even the Rain* climaxes when the events portrayed in the historic drama sequences are shocking enough to the native non-professional actresses that they refuse to reenact them for Sebastián. In particular, they refuse to drown their babies, even if they are just dolls, since to them it is an act too brutal to be represented at all. The Bolivian women refuse to use water as an agent of death and as such form a resistance to the director's will. In a parallel scene earlier in the film, there is a group of women fighting Bechtel employees and the local police

force against the appropriation of a well they had dug themselves, claiming they needed to do so in order for their children to drink. There is a clear association here between the colonialist and neo-colonialist temporalities and so the fictional drama generates a link between the film industry and corporate capitalism. While the ambitious Sebastián wishes to portray an episode of children's mass murder in the name of historical accuracy, Bechtel puts children's lives at risk via the mismanagement of a natural resource.

Bollaín shows that women are the new source of cheap labor and exploitation by multinational corporations expanding in developing countries. At the same time, the Columbus film being an international co-production, and thus part of a corporate culture, there is a risk that educated postcolonial directors such as Sebastián began speaking instead of disempowered indigenous groups. In turn, Bollaín is skeptical of any attempt (including her own) to portray the lives of the Bolivian women. Thus, she located the agency of change in the insurgent women themselves rather than in the engagement of non-native authoritative directors. The drowning sequence also serves to raise some questions related to the anti-colonialist films of which *Even the Rain* itself is an integral part. How far can an anti-colonialist film go with the violent exploitation of native bodies before becoming a cinematic spectacle itself? Has there been an escalation of violence in the depiction of colonialism? How strictly necessary is the representation of violence and how authentic are the motivations of the directors? These are all questions that are deliberately left open in the film through the ethical ambiguity of Sebastián/Bernal. The radical Mexican director tries to persuade the women by claiming he will film and document their past experiences, and his benevolent impulse to represent the indig-

enous women risks appropriating their own voices. Bollaín shows that Bolivian women are hardly heard or recognized within the current global cinematic industry. Nevertheless she does not deny their capacity for social change, as their resistance is able to temporarily block the entire shooting of the Columbus film. Because of them, the drowning sequence will never be shot, at least not in the way Sebastián imagined.

In any case, it cannot be a coincidence that the historic drama sequences are a compilation of various brutalities. A critic may still wonder if *Even the Rain* itself is entangled in the contradiction of displaying violence with the excuse of self-awareness. This self-awareness is not a limitation, but rather a vital contradiction, and violent/controversial images need to be shown to represent the consequences of colonialism. Sebastián pushes the violent exploitation pedal, but since we know the behind the scenes story thanks to documentarian María, we are aware that his honest depiction of colonialism is yet another form of exploitation, partly motivated by narcissism.

The violence climaxes in the scene in which the Indians who refuse to convert are tied to crosses and burned alive. At the end of the sequence, the police arrive to arrest Daniel. At this point the film's intertwined temporalities are fully manifested, since the leader of the insubordinate Indians in 1492 is also one of the leaders of the guerra del agua and fights the police while still wearing his film costume and makeup. The extras, also in costume, revolt against the police and help Daniel escape, recalling a scene they had enacted as part of the historic drama. María begins to film the confrontation but is immediately stopped by Sebastián. Thus, the historic and cinematic temporalities of the Cochabamba affair and the colonial exploitation operated by Columbus overlap fully

into each other. This scene is representative of the film as a summa of the achievements of regional cinema, and at the same time a beginning toward a new global aesthetic. Bollain's film is conceptually more self-conscious than ever, and more aware of the difficulties of grasping the experiences of the Bolivians in ways that may adequately reflect their present situation, and such self-consciousness of the limits of representation in the end becomes its force.

Notes

¹ For a detailed article based on research in the archives of the Center for Documentation and Information Bolivia see Assies, Willem. "David versus Goliath in Cochabamba: Water Rights, Neoliberalism, and the Revival of Social Protest in Bolivia." See also the account of the non-profit, consumer rights advocacy group Public Citizen. "Water Privatization Case Study: Cochabamba, Bolivia" <[www.citizen.org/documents/Bolivia_\(PDF\).PDF](http://www.citizen.org/documents/Bolivia_(PDF).PDF)>. Other useful insights come from Emanuele Lobina at the PSIRU (Public Services international Research Unit), University of Greenwich. <www.psiru.org/reports/Cochabamba.doc>.

² For an account based on a series of interviews with Oscar Olivera, one of the local activists that took part to the revolution see *Cochabamba: Water War in Bolivia*.

³ For an historical overview of key events generating a wave of documentary or documentary-like films in Latin America and a textual analysis of some of these works, see also the volume edited by Julianne Burton, *The Social Documentary in Latin America*.

⁴ In addition Aduviri, who delivers a memorable performance in *Even the Rain* as an activist/indigenous chief, is an aspiring director and teacher at the Film School in Los Altos (Cabitza).

⁵ "The great advantage of Third Cinema is that while it is politically oppositional to dominant cinema (and Second Cinema), it does not seek, at the level of form and cinematic language,

to reinvent cinema from scratch (it is too interested in cinema to do that), nor does it adopt a position of pure opposition on the question of form (it is too interested in communication for that); instead its relation to First and Second Cinema is dialectical: i.e. it seeks to *transform* rather than simply reject these *cinemas*; it seeks to bring out their stifled potentialities, those aspects of the social world they repress or only obliquely acknowledge; Third Cinema seeks to detach what is positive, life-affirming, and critical of Cinemas One and Two and give them a more expanded, socially connected articulation" (Wayne 10).

⁶ For an interesting case study, see Tamara L. Falicov. "Programa Ibermedia Co-Production and the Cultural Politics of Constructing an Ibero-American Audiovisual Space."

⁷ The commitment and sensibility shown toward local Bolivian communities by the real crew of *Even the Rain* were documented in *The Cinema of Iciar Bollain*, which makes the insinuations by critics appear unfair, since they provided support for a local film school, a new water deposit and a bridge, and paid the extras \$20 a day (Santaolalla 209).

⁸ This is evident in the opening credits of *The New World*, which feature historical maps, or the old master prints in Scott's *Conquest of Paradise*, showing a red background followed by the superimposed title: "500 years ago, Spain was a nation gripped by fear and superstition, ruled by the crown and a ruthless Inquisition that persecuted men for daring to dream. One man challenged this power. Driven by his sense of destiny, he crossed the sea of darkness in search of honor, gold, and the greater glory of God." These titles reveal that what follows is a Eurocentric (it is a full hour before indigenous people appear in the film) portrayal of Columbus as an ambitious and progressive idealist. At the end of Scott's film we see an aged Columbus looking over the sea dictating the memories of the expedition to his son.

⁹ Malick's work is informed by a grid of literary sources such as James Fenimore Cooper, James Jones, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman, and by the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger.

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Cronopio
Photo by Norma Guzmán